

Clinical guideline concerning Occupational Therapy for preventing falls in elderly people living at home in Belgium

Leen De coninck¹

¹Artevelde University College, Ghent, Belgium, ²University of Ghent, Ghent, Belgium

Introduction

The effectiveness of occupational therapy (OT) in the multidisciplinary approach of fall prevention has been proven internationally. Concerning the most effective and efficient occupational therapeutic approach of fall incidents in Flanders, literature does not provide a consensus.

Objective

What is the most effective and efficient occupational therapeutic intervention preventing falls in elderly people living at home in Flanders?

Methodology

The research was conducted according to the principles of Evidence Based Practice. For the qualification of the occupational therapeutic intervention several sources were consulted, sc scientific literature, Delphi technique and Focus group.

Literature search concerned the Cochrane Library databanks, the Medline and Cinahl.

Within the scope of the Delphi technique three experts were selected.

The focus group consisted of 'hands-on' experts in OT. The participants were asked to take the perception of elderly people into account when formulating occupational therapeutic interventions.

Results

The Cochrane review of Gillespie et al. (2003) proves that multidisciplinary multifactor intervention programmes have been effective both among a select population of elderly people with a history of falling and among a non-select population. The fall risk factors are 'decline of mobility and balance, employment of means, decline of sight and hearing, cognitional and emotional problems, orthostatic hypotension, components concerning the house and housing circumstances, risky behaviour and continence problems'.

The following recommendations are made:

- In multidisciplinary intervention programmes, advice of an occupational therapist concerning staying active in performing daily activities is effective in decreasing fall incidents.
- In a multidisciplinary approach of preventing fall incidents, recommendations by occupational therapists concerning housing adaptations and behaviour are effective in function of visual restrictions.
- In a multidisciplinary approach of preventing fall incidents, house visits of an occupational therapist are effective in helping elderly people with a history of falling.

Conclusion

OT can prevent falling and can therefore lead to more independence of and quality of life for elderly people.

The structural definition of OT in the general policy in Flanders concerning preventing fall incidents needs to be reconsidered.

Contribution to the evidence base of occupational therapy

OT research conducted according to the principles of EBP has evidence to policy.